

**RIVERSIDE COUNTY  
CIVIL COURT CLOSURE  
INFORMATION POINTS – DEC. 2005**

- Beginning December 12, 2005, trials in most civil cases in the Riverside County court system will be suspended until January 20, 2006. At that time, the court will look at the number pending criminal trials to determine if the civil shutdown will be extended. This is the second civil shutdown for the Riverside County Superior Court – the first occurred in June 2004. The shutdowns are the result of the strict time limits of criminal cases, which have a constitutional guarantee of a speedy trial – ten days from the time that both sides announce they are ready or the case is dismissed.
- For the current civil shutdown, the court has a backlog of 1,000 waiting criminal cases. In June 2004, the court had 500 criminal cases waiting for trial.
- Civil shutdown is a misnomer because the civil judicial officers don't really shut down their civil calendars -- they do double duty. They are still expected to handle all their civil law and motion matters on their morning calendars and then hear criminal trials for the rest of the day once the civil matters are finished.
- Shutting down civil causes expensive delays in civil cases and loads the civil judges with additional work. It deprives community members of access to justice and can substantially impact the quality of justice delivered by the court. As one civil attorney noted, [the civil shutdown is]... "horrible for people who need relief in the courts. It keeps people in limbo indefinitely, people who are losing their housing or losing their ability to earn money." One civil litigant, whose trial was scheduled to begin in December, now has a trial date on June 19, 2006.<sup>i</sup>
- As of November 3, 2005, 481 inmates countywide had been in custody and awaiting trial for more than a year. Approximately 84 percent of the inmate population in the county's five jails has not been convicted or sentenced as they are waiting for trial.<sup>ii</sup> Often these defendants are indigent and cannot post bail. They must spend many months in custody waiting for their day in court. This culture of continuance keeps victims and defendants in limbo.
- The Riverside County Superior Court has implemented numerous programs in order to have civil cases settle before trial. They include mediation and arbitration done by private attorneys, having a retired judge who meets with parties to reach a settlement, and a judicial mediation program. While these programs do enable many parties to reach agreement and thus avoid trial, there are still numerous cases that go to trial.

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<sup>i</sup> Article from the Press-Enterprise, 12/19/05, by Richard DeAtley

<sup>ii</sup> Statistics provided by the Riverside County Sheriff's Department.